

EVALUATION OF THE WELSH REGIONAL AGGREGATES WORKING PARTIES - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional Aggregate Working Parties (RAWPs) were established in England and Wales in the early 1970s to enable the provision of aggregates to be managed in such a way as to ensure an adequate security of supply for the construction industry, but also to address concerns regarding the impact of aggregates extraction on the environment.

Following devolution, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has followed an increasingly divergent path from England in its policies for minerals planning, especially with regard to the supply of aggregates. There has been particular emphasis on the use of alternative (secondary and recycled) materials and consideration has been given to a move away from historical supply patterns to the current notions of sustainability including the concept of the 'environmental capacity' of potential source areas to produce aggregates with minimal environmental impacts. As part of these changes, WAG enhanced the role of the RAWPs to provide additional assessments and monitoring reports relating to wider sustainability issues and to provide 5-yearly Regional Technical Statements.

In the light of these policy changes, WAG considered that it was an appropriate time to re-evaluate the role and purpose of the RAWPs in Wales. This report presents the findings of that evaluation. In summary, the key findings are as follows:

The **Managed Aggregates Supply System** is regarded by all stakeholders as both necessary and working well. The system provides an important degree of confidence to the minerals and construction industries in the long term security of supply. Without it, there would be less scope for strategic thinking, less opportunity to achieve sustainable supply patterns and much greater reliance on the appeals process, at much greater cost to everyone.

The **Role of the RAWPs** in monitoring and delivering the managed aggregate supply system is also seen by stakeholders as both important and necessary. Without the RAWPs it would be far more difficult for the WAG to manage the system, to interface with mineral operators, or to achieve the consensus needed between industry and MPAs for the system to work well. The current arrangement of two RAWPs in Wales is considered appropriate due to the very different supply and demand patterns within the two regions. The existing functions of the RAWPs are generally appropriate, but some fine tuning is required.

The **RAWPs Membership** is considered to be about right, and should remain technically focused, but one important omission is the 'end users' sector.

The **Regional Technical Statements** (RTS) now lie at the heart of the managed supply system in Wales and are seen by all consultees as a positive step forward. There is a need, however, for further refinement and for clarification of the status and ownership of the documents. The preparation of the statements has been both difficult and time consuming, not least because this is the first time the RTS concept has been implemented. Both industry and MPAs have noted that the clarity of presentation, the currency of the data and the procedures for dealing with consultation responses have all been compromised to varying degrees – perhaps because of the need to complete the documents within a tight timescale. They also consider that, when the documents are next revised, they need to be written more concisely and in a style that is more attractive and easier to follow.

The attempts to address **Environmental Capacity** (using the IMAECA method) and carbon reduction through the **Proximity Principle** are seen by most stakeholders as being potentially better, *in principle*, than the less prescriptive system in England. However, there are still doubts within industry, especially, as to the validity of the IMAECA approach and more specific concerns regarding the criteria used and the fact that the **apportionment** calculations for individual MPAs do not seem to have taken any account of Environmental Capacity or of differences in external demand between different MPAs (e.g. exports of High Specification Aggregate from South Wales and Limestone exports to NW England from North Wales).

A number of difficulties have been faced by RAWPs in the **collection of data**, particularly on secondary and recycled aggregates. Through their annual reports and RTS, the RAWPs have reported that much of the source data on these materials is of questionable reliability, not least because of differences in survey methods, differences in information sources, and low response rates due to the effects of survey fatigue. Additional data is needed on the transport of aggregates, in order to understand the complexities which already distort the 'proximity principle' (e.g. local distribution patterns via intermediate depots, asphalt plants and concrete batching facilities; and exports of High Specification Aggregates to many parts of England). Such data is also needed to provide a basis for measuring the effectiveness of any future changes in reducing carbon emissions. The data is complex, however, and time consuming to collate. There will always be a trade-off between the complexity of the information requested and the completeness of the resulting survey responses. The most complete data is that produced by the operators in connection with the 4-yearly AM surveys.

With regard to the **Technical Secretaries**, there is a clear potential for these roles to be expanded further to provide MPAs with technical advice and proactive guidance, to encourage cooperative working between MPAs, and to coordinate feedback on the implementation and need for improvement of the RTS. The Technical Secretaries and RAWP Chairmen roles are, however, already very demanding on the host MPA and difficult to achieve on a part-time basis. The situation is compounded by the chronic shortage of experienced MPA officers to take on the role and the need for additional funding if the role is to be expanded further. As in any supply chain, there is a vital need for 'succession planning' to ensure that the system continues to be managed effectively in order to ensure a continued security of supply. A clear strategy and appropriate funding arrangements therefore need to be identified. Specific recommendations have been given to address these points and with regard to strengthening the capabilities of small unitary authorities to engage more effectively in the strategic planning process, through the creation of sub-regional groupings of MPAs.

In conclusion, this review has found that, in most respects, the RAWPs have fulfilled their obligations to the best of their abilities. In most cases this has been sufficient to enable the system to work well, but there is room for improvement in certain areas. Where the RAWPs' objectives have not been fully met, or have been met only with difficulties and/or delays, this has been due to a combination of external factors, ranging from a lack of reliable data in some areas to the pressures of undertaking increased workloads against tight timescales with limited resources. The various recommendations outlined in Chapter 7 of this report should help to address the specific difficulties which have hindered better performance.

Further information, including how to obtain a copy of the full report, can be obtained from:

Kate Harris
Capita Symonds Ltd.
Capita Symonds House
Wood Street
East Grinstead
West Sussex
RH19 1UU

Tel: 01342 327161
Fax: 01342 315927

CAPITA SYMONDS



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government